

OFFICE OF MANAGING DIRECTOR
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON DC

FACT SHEET

(rev) March 8, 2002

Updated Information: The FCC has resumed U.S. Postal Service mail deliveries to its off-site mail processing facility in Capitol Heights, Maryland. Service was discontinued in late January after one of ten samples in a routine test found a small trace of anthrax. (See "Background" below.) The Capitol Heights facility was decontaminated and retested, with negative results, resulting in the decision to resume normal mail service to the facility. In addition, all unprocessed mail to the FCC that was held up in late January because of the discovery of the anthrax trace was commercially cleansed and is being processed for delivery within the Commission.

Background: At the FCC's request and as a routine precaution, the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) on Tuesday, January 29, 2002, tested the FCC's off-site mail processing facility in Capitol Heights, Maryland for contamination. After the first anthrax contamination incident on Capitol Hill last fall, mail receipt, processing and screening was immediately moved out of FCC headquarters to the Capitol Heights facility.

On Wednesday, January 30, PHS officials informed the FCC that the preliminary result for one of the samples was positive for a scant amount of anthrax contamination. According to PHS, the amount of contamination was too small to deliver an infectious dose. The PHS believed this to be a residual trace amount of material resulting from cross-contamination of mail, but awaited final test results from the CDC which would not be available until Monday, February 4.

The PHS had informed the FCC that there was no reason to be concerned about handling mail already delivered to FCC headquarters. Nevertheless, the FCC took a number of immediate steps to further ensure the safety of FCC staff. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) had positive test results in its mailroom earlier this year, and the FCC followed similar procedures in response to the FCC situation.

The FCC immediately stopped all U.S. Postal Service mail deliveries to the FCC off-site Capitol Heights facility until receipt of the final CDC results. Initially this included stopping the processing of commercial overnight deliveries, such as FedEx, UPS, and DHL, and hand-delivered packages that also were routinely received at the Capitol Heights facility. However, because these services did not risk of cross-contamination with U.S. Postal Service material, effective Friday, February 1, the FCC resumed receiving these materials in the Capitol Heights facility away from the mail processing area. The FCC's filing window at 236 Massachusetts Avenue, NE, for hand-delivered or messenger-delivered paper filings for the Commission's Secretary was unaffected by this situation; filings continued to be accepted and processed by the Office of the Secretary at that site.

Although none of the FCC contract mail employees at the Capitol Heights facility exhibited any signs of illness as a result of this trace exposure, as a precaution arrangements were made for them to receive preventative antibiotics.

On Thursday, January 31, a PHS physician came to the FCC to meet with interested FCC staff in the Commission Meeting Room and was available after the presentation in our Health Unit for employees who had personal questions.

On Monday, February 4, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported its test of the trace of anthrax showed a very slow platelet growth which indicated a weak or very scant amount of anthrax consistent with cross-contamination of mail.

Because of the weakness of the confirmed trace, CDC also recommended that FCC mail processing contractors not take antibiotics, since these are only intended to be taken for inhalation anthrax, and if continued, could be harmful in some situations.

On Tuesday, February 5, the FCC, as a further precaution, tested its mailroom in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and learned Thursday, February 7 that the test results were negative for any traces of anthrax at that facility.

The FCC will continue to periodically test the mail processing facility, as it did on January 29, and in conjunction with PHS and CDC, is committed to taking every reasonable precaution to ensure the safety of FCC staff.

Additional information on the general subject of anthrax contamination is available at www.opm.gov/ehs/terrorism.htm.